

Bobolink

Dolichonyx oryzivorus

STATUS

Threatened 

Vulnerable 

47



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Species Description

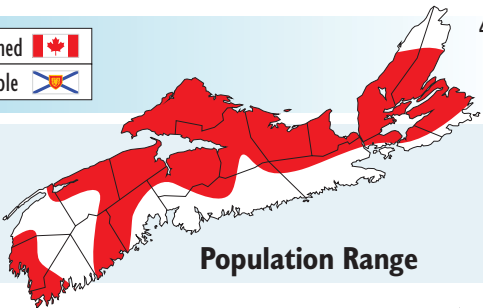
The Bobolink is a small bird (16-20 cm long) with a short, conical bill. Breeding males are black with a distinctive, large pale yellow patch on the back of their heads and a white lower back and rump. Females are more sparrow-like with a crown alternating in dark and light stripes, a light brown breast, and brown, white and black patterning on the wings. Prior to migration in August, males moult to a plumage similar looking to females. Its song is bubbly and complex.



© BETTY AZZOTTI

Female

Found throughout most of NS. Winters in South America. Has declined by 88% over the last 40 years in Canada.



Population Range

Habitat

Through the breeding season, the Bobolink is found in open grassland habitats including hayfields, pastures, and abandoned farmland that contains species such as clover, tall grasses, and broad-leaved plants. It can also be observed in meadows near the coast. It typically is absent from fields with short grasses or monocultures of corn, soybean or wheat, fragmented habitats, and areas near forest edges. Nests are shallow cups built directly on the ground and are often placed at the base of a plant for concealment.



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The Bobolink is observed from May to September in grassy habitats.

Interesting Points

- The Bobolink song closely resembles “R2D2” from Star Wars!
- Over half a million nests are unintentionally destroyed each year in Canada due to agricultural practices.
- This species migrates an incredible 20,000 km to and from its overwintering grounds each year.
- Its diet switches from insects in the summer to seeds and rice in the winter.
- This species is considered an agricultural pest in rice fields. In the early 1900s over half a million birds could be killed each year in the southern states.



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Similar Species

Male breeding plumage is distinct and unlikely to be confused with other species. Female Bobolinks and late-summer male plumage is more sparrow-like, with a pale nape and light bill.

Red-winged Blackbird (female):

Larger; heavily striped underparts; longer bill.



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Savannah Sparrow:

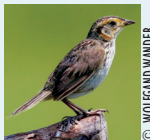
White breast and belly with dark streaks; dark stripes on sides of throat.



© HOWARD PATTERSON

Sharp-tailed Sparrow (or Saltmarsh Sparrow):

Grey crown and back; white belly.



© WOLFGANG WANDER

Nelson's Sparrow:

Triangle of orange colouration on face; grey bill.



© ZAK POHLEN

Threats to Survival

- Loss of nests and adults from agricultural operations (earlier and more frequent haying).
- Habitat loss (conversion to intensive agricultural crops, farmland succession, urbanization).
- Habitat fragmentation (increased nest predation).
- Overgrazing and trampling by livestock.
- Pesticide use (throughout range) and bird control (wintering grounds).

How You Can Help

Report all sightings of this species to eBird. Delay the haying of fields during the Bobolinks breeding season to prevent nest destruction. Landowners can also allow areas of their property to seed with grass and maintain by mowing every 1-5 years to prevent the growth of woody vegetation. This will benefit many grassland species. Bobolinks prefer large fields (>30 acres), but also inhabit smaller plots.



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Contacts, Information, Sighting Reports & Stewardship Opportunities

Contact: Environment Canada (506) 364-5044 or www.ec.gc.ca

Info: www.sararegistry.gc.ca, www.allaboutbirds.org, www.mba-aom.ca

Sighting Reports: eBird.org, 1-866-727-3447, www.speciesatrisk.ca/sightings

Stewardship: NSNT Bird's Eye View: nsnt.ca/participate/volunteer